



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE ACUTENESS OF THE NEGRO QUESTION: A SUGGESTED REMEDY.

BY WILLIAM DORSEY JELKS, EX-GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA.

---

ONE thing may be taken for granted in discussing the ever-present race question, in so far as that question affects the people who live in the Southern States: that is, that there is no social equality and that there will be none for any day which can be foreseen. No day will come within this generation or the next when negroes will be unprovided with separate coaches on roads, a division of seats in street-cars, separate hotels and at least separate sections at playhouses. We may say that this law of separation is written in the blood of the whites and is ineradicable.

Much less shall there be terms of intimacy in the family. The white man's table is not for the negro. Whatever may be the virtues of any colored man, or however admirable he may be from many standpoints, he is not for a place at the white man's fire-side or the white man's table. These intimacies would mean that he is fit for the white man's daughter. After an evening meal so surrounded or attended one can hear the head of the house exclaim: "I have supped full of horrors." There may be people, there are people, who do not comprehend this feeling. They say they do not get our angle of view. Strive as they may, they cannot see the matter as we do. My people find it even more difficult to understand the Easterner's view.

However others feel about it, it is settled that we will not have any suggestion of social equality in the South. To this extent there must be unending separation of the races. We have drawn a circle about us and propose to control this feature, at least, and control it above other important matters of our life. We will not even discuss riding in the same coach, sleeping at the same hotel, eating at the same table or studying at the same school.

And there can be no political equality, as a matter of fact. There is none now in most of the Southern States, and those States which have not done so are preparing to practically disfranchise the negro race, or certainly the less intelligent and less worthy portion of it.

It would be far better if the two races could be separated. The tension between them in most of the Southern States has been very great, though less serious in Alabama than in other Southern States, and less serious now than in the early part or middle of last year. Aside from this view, and for other reasons which might be named that prompt me to wish a separation, the negro could grow in a home of his own. At least he would have an opportunity to do so, and, less pessimistic than others, I believe that he might achieve a fair government. I know what is said of his incapacity for government. I bear in mind that in his native home, where he has been the absolute master for centuries, he has constructed no system of architecture or currency, rejoiced in no sweet songs, painted no great pictures, had no schools, established no great charities and contrived only the most primitive form of tribal rule. Notwithstanding this terrific indictment, with the schooling he has had in the United States, he might, after all, building on his own efforts, aspirations and responsibilities, found a society which would be sufficient for his comfort and happiness.

I should welcome, on some surprising and sunny morning, the presence of an air-ship at every cabin door to bear these people away to some happy land of their own. We might hope that, after a hundred years in this half-way home, they would construct and build a government satisfactory for their purposes. A great caravan of air-ships would bring opportunity to the colored man and blessings to the race left behind.

But the air-ship will not come; nor will the South be drained of the negroes as suggested by Senator Morgan; or, if it is to be drained, the end will be so indefinitely in the future that it is hardly worth while to discuss the suggestion now. The Senator's plan was to assist a few to some one of the Philippine Islands where the natives would welcome them, or to some portion of Africa; these, prospering, would furnish an invitation which would finally drain this country of all its Afro-American population. Nor yet will the question be settled, as has been suggested

recently in a magazine article, by dividing the Southern States between the whites and the blacks. If any white people are to give up their homes for the exclusive use of the black man, why not the white people of Massachusetts or Vermont? Citizens of these two States are as much responsible for the negro's presence here as citizens of Alabama or Georgia. Have the whites of Alabama any less right to their own homes than, say, the people of New England? The writer alluded to is very generous with territory of which he owns no part, and with other people's homes. Under certain conditions, that is, if the two races cannot live their lives in the South as he thinks they ought, then the soil of several States should be taken from the whites and given over to exclusive negro purposes and uses. "It is idiotic," he writes, "to talk of deporting negroes to some other country." Why not as "idiotic" to talk of deporting white men? The nearness of one Southern State to another need not figure in the calculation. What is one more night out to a man who is on his way to a home in New England?

Any talk of any kind of deportation is idiotic, I quite agree. We are to live here and together, and that means that the races must have a better understanding with each other. The education of the negro has made him a burden, or, to express it differently, far less valuable as a citizen. The farm is the one opening for him, and this, when he has acquired a smattering of letters, he leaves. He congregates in the towns and leads for the most part an idle life, and, in large numbers, a vicious life. Teaching him to read has thus far proven a curse to the material interests of the South, and this beyond the cost of the schools. The hope many had lay in the expectation that a second and third generation that could read would mark a distinct improvement on the first. We are yet to learn if this hope is groundless. Books have given us a larger proportion of vagrants, and a larger proportion of thieves as well. The non-producers are all thieves. It is the presence of these two offences, and not the more serious crimes, that interrupts the cordial relations of the races and strains the situation to the breaking-point. Assaults on women are not, primarily, the provoking cause of mob law. This statement will surprise some people, but it is true. No statement is safer. The tension is produced by the nagging small offences which are with us every day, and which we seem powerless to defend our-

selves against. One cannot hope to take up again even a potato, once it is laid down, if he omits the precaution of putting a padlock upon it, and this is the case in town or country. Those of the colored race who will not themselves commit these petty offences have not been willing, knowing the culprits, to turn them over to the law. The whole negro family is charged with standing together to protect the criminals. The absolute knowledge of this union of the negro race against the law was the primary cause of the Atlanta riot, and is the underlying cause of almost every lynching that has taken place. Given this feeling and an assault to rape, and the smothered fires break loose!

During the greater part of the six years which I served as Governor of Alabama, I had repeated talks with leading colored men and kept up a correspondence with others throughout the State, to the end that I might get their cooperation with conservative white men in the interest of law and order. From whatever cause, it is true that the relations of the races are smoother and more kindly in Alabama than in any other Southern State, and there have been fewer lynchings in this State than in any of our neighbors during the six years covering my particular observation. There are good law-abiding men and women among them—many of them—and they want to live in peace; I find a growing disposition, too, to give up the law-breakers and to make common cause with the officers of the law. These have been heretofore overawed by the less decent element. They are preparing now to whip the thieves out of their church congregations and to scorn the loafers from their societies.

Those who have not had the deplorable experience cannot understand what it means to have an army of vagrants always among them. Out of a population in the capital city of Alabama of perhaps four thousand negro males, grown, more than one thousand of the men do not work at all, to say nothing of the women. Fifty per cent. of the other three thousand do not work three days in the week, and they are without any visible means of support. This situation is duplicated in every town in Alabama. They must live. They live on the white people, practically none of them on their own race. They constitute in the State a vast and growing army—an army larger than the one Lee surrendered at Appomattox and perhaps as large as the one the great Captain brought away from the burning Kremlin. Our

vagrants must go. They bear upon us too heavily. About every fourth working-man, in his fight for better conditions for himself and his family, is bearing one of the non-producers on his back. They must reform or go. They are the people who are breaking the back of peace. If they fail to work or leave, we are on the verge of a dreadful upheaval.

Our negro schools have not taught men the love of work, nor do they seem to be impressing upon them respect for the Commandments. The colored pulpit, speaking of it generally, leads no crusade against theft. It is impossible to assume, and no man at all familiar with the conditions believes it possible to assume, that theft and vagrancy could be so common if proper respect for the mandates written in stone on Sinai was taught either in the pulpit or the schools. The boys and girls lack home training. We cannot reach that condition until we have reached the future heads of families. They lack religious training, and we cannot control the negro pulpit. We cannot prevent free speech.

There is a remedy. The schools are taught by means of money from the State's strong-box. We can reach the teacher. We can insist that no school shall be taught by a man who is not properly impressed with the beauty and dignity of manual labor, and who does not consider the thief as a proper subject for present and eternal punishment. In Alabama, the schools have not been so taught. The negro teacher, for the most part, has either taught the beauty of idleness and the decency of theft, or has, at least, made no impression to the contrary on the plastic mind of the child. It is far better to have a citizenship which is honest than one which can read. Illiteracy is not the greatest evil. No school is properly taught from which the children can emerge without respect for constituted authority and human statutes, to say nothing of the higher law.

Their worship in the churches is picturesque. They rejoice in songs and hallelujahs, and are most happy. They are discriminating in their selection of passages from Holy Writ. They by no means enjoy equally all parts of the gospels and epistles. That passage from one of the epistles that informs them that "they may know they have passed from death unto life if they love the brethren" is one of the most comforting. They read it literally, and allow themselves some indifference to the mere "thou shalt nots." They find in the passage a suggestion of

ample opportunity to work their way by St. Peter without troubling themselves too much with disagreeable, troublesome and downright orders. They love the brethren, and they sing the songs of Zion!

The preachers are afraid to stand up and teach the simpler doctrines. It is easier to waft the imagination of the amiable and loving flock to Heaven, on beds of oratorical and musical flowers, than to command its members to take up the cross and suffer. To hale one of its members before the bar for lying, adultery or stealing, in one of the average negro churches, is treason. The Shepherd may have an inclination to do so when one of his flock has committed such crimes, but he dare not. The keeping of any of the Commandments is not considered one of the requirements of church-membership, and a pastor who would press the point would lose his place.

We cannot reach the preacher, but we can look after the schools. The teacher must be licensed, and certain requirements as to moral character are set down; when licensed, he can get a school only by selection of school trustees. It is very plain that the negro teacher in Alabama is, for the larger part, totally unfit for the calling. He is doing a destructive work, and taking the State's sacred school money in payment for it. We are thus poisoning the fountain which is to supply our future citizenship! The schools are turning out thieves and vagrants in companies, battalions and armies. The negro school, still speaking generally, has no influence in making more valuable citizens. On the contrary, there could have been no more of these lawbreakers if there had been no schools among them for forty years! It is perfectly plain that the results prove that the pupils from the vast majority of the negro schools have been imbued in no wise with a sense of the dignity of labor or the propriety and advantage of obeying divine and human laws. Shall such teachers be allowed to do this destructive work further?

We cannot refuse the negro a primary education. He must have that, not in the interest of himself so much, as of the State. He should get it through preceptors who not only keep the laws themselves, but are brave enough to make respect for law the atmosphere of the schoolrooms.

It is not intended to express the belief that all public schools taught by negroes are subject to this criticism. The two leading

institutions for negroes in Alabama and presided over by negroes are, so far as I can judge, doing a clean, good work. Their graduates, in character, are far above their people about them. They are the leaders of their race in good works. This is indubitably true.

After changing some views through the years, I am now distinctly of the opinion that Southern white men must teach the negro schools. I say "Southern," because my observation is that Eastern white men and women are mischief-makers. They do not understand the negro character, and they cannot understand it.

Will Southern white men undertake the work? There is much prejudice against it. It can be removed. The Teachers Association in Alabama will discuss the question at its next State meeting, and, I believe, will resolve that it is the patriotic duty of Southern white men—not white women—to engage in this reformatory work. Teaching is one of the great professions. There is only one that is higher. If it be such a great calling, to teach a negro how to become a good citizen ought not to be considered a less honorable pursuit than merchandizing or farming. The white preacher goes at the sick man's call and the white doctor; and charitable women, thousands of them within my personal knowledge, and of my own family, wait upon those who, from poverty or illness, need them. To teach them should be considered a leading work of the State!

I know of no other remedy as certain, if it be only partial. Besides being only partial, it has the disadvantage of being no speedy cure. It is a remedy of years. In the mean time, and until their future men and women can make an impress on their kind, the conservatives of both races must get together looking to a common fight against the violators of any of the large or small provisions of the statutes. The two races together can win this fight! With positive forbearance and justice on the part of the whites, and a determination to make common cause with the law officers on the part of honorable blacks, the two races together can hold anarchy in check, until future colored men and women have had opportunity to learn a different way from different schools. As I have said, the feeling is far less intense now than it was a year ago, and it appears that we are moving into smoother waters.

WILLIAM DORSEY JELKS.